



Neither Assad Nor NATO

Further Notes On Kurdistan And The Universality Of People's War

Major Positions

Many tendencies have heatedly debated the situation in Syria over the last few years, attempting to identify a progressive force to uphold. Some, such as the ISO have upheld the narrative of the “Syrian Revolution”, declaring support for the Free Syrian Army. A blind eye is required to miss the fact that these rebels have lent themselves to the service of US imperialism, which actively armed and financed them. This military coalition is the united effort of factions of the ruling class that want to open Syria more to US imperialism, and those groups in Syrian society repressed under the Ba’athist regime.

There are Brezhnevite and right-opportunist tendencies who upheld Bashar Al-Assad either as a genuine anti-imperialist progressive, or at the very least the only force capable of a defense of Syria from imperialism. There can be no denial that US imperialism is very much present in Syria stoking tensions, but neither can it be denied that the civil war began due to Bashar Al-Assad’s violent repression of protests in 2011. These protests were the result of legitimate grievances on the part of the Syrian people, Sunni Arab farmers and workers who were dispossessed and subjected to economic hardships due to neoliberal reforms passed by the government. Beyond just the condemnation of the response to these protests, these facts allow us to glean the actual class nature of the Syrian Baathist state. Assad is not the national bourgeoisie, as he is not aiming at the national development of Syria but rather administers a right wing, bureaucratic capitalism while collaborating with US imperialism, selling out the country to Russian imperialism, and embracing the Zionist entity of Israel. The baathists facilitate national oppression within Syria with the repression of the Sunni Arab majority by a Shia Alawite minority ruling class, as well as the genocide of the Kurds. Assad even allowed ISIS to cultivate its strength in Syria, engaging in oil transactions with them while enjoying a tactical peace so as to allow ISIS to do away with the “moderate rebels”.

On the other hand, Maoists have held a position that rejects both the NATO rebels and the comprador

bureaucrat capitalist Assad: that Syria is a site of inter-imperialist conflict between US imperialism and its proxies, and Russian imperialism and its allies. Revolutionaries do not side with either imperialism, but rather with those forces that represent and advance the struggles of the people.

During the summer of 2013 a controversial position was released on the US Maoist blog Maosoleum, *Neither Assad Nor NATO: Notes On The Universality Of Protracted People’s War*. The piece argued that amidst many reactionary forces, the Syrian Kurds were paving the way for a people’s war that would bring the possibility of fending off imperialism and usurping domestic reactionaries. The Kurds, a nation made stateless by the carving up of the Middle East by European imperialism after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, have historically waged a progressive liberation movement at the level of armed struggle. This position faced much backlash– it was accused of being unrealistic and idealist, and of cryptically supporting imperialist intervention by denouncing Assad as a reactionary.

Yet what were the politics playing out on the ground for revolutionaries to find unity with? The anti-government rebels who wanted Syria to become a neo-colony of US imperialism? Assad who massacred the Syrian people and kept the country in the orbit of Russian imperialism and Iranian expansionism? Or could it be the Kurds whose armed struggle for liberation and autonomy have led to their being listed as foreign terrorists by the western imperialists, the Kurds who maintain internationalism and explicitly stand for a democratic Syria free of imperialism, whose forces numbered in the tens of thousands at the time (having grown significantly since)?

These are the politics Maoists united with, and if political power grows out of the barrel of a gun then the Kurds had a very realistic potential to execute these politics through people’s war. And this is what happened, so let us now look into the revolutionary advances the Kurds have made while the FSA is waning and Assad is inviting the US to launch airstrikes in Syria.

The Universality of People's War: Kurdistan and Beyond

People's War is the Maoist military doctrine for making revolution, fought through the mobilization of the popular masses under revolutionary leadership. This is what is playing out in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) where the Kurds have expelled the Syrian government and its forces, and are carrying out a social revolution. The *Autonomy Region Rojava* was declared in July 2012 during the Rojava Revolution, and in the three cantons of this autonomous region social life is being reorganized into local communes that extend democratic rights to women and minorities.

“Aiming at decentralizing decision-making and realizing self-rule, village- or street communes consisting of 30-150 households have been organised. These communes decide on questions regarding administration, electricity, provision of nutrition, as well as discussing and solving other social problems. They have commissions for the organisation of defence, justice, infrastructure, ecology, youth, as well as economy. Some have erected communal cooperatives, e.g. bakeries, sewing workshops or agricultural initiatives. They also organise the support of the poorest of the community with basic nutrition and fuel. Delegates of the communes form together a council for 7-10 villages or a city-district, and every city has yet another city council. The city council is made up of representatives of the communes, all political parties, the organisation of the fallen fighters, the women's organisation, and the youth organisation. All councils as well as the communes have a 40% quota for women. The decisions are to be made on basis of consensus and equal speaking-time is enforced. Besides this, a co-chairperson system has been implemented for all organisations, which means that all councils have both a female and male chairperson. All members are suggested and elected by the population. However, according to the co-president of the PYD, Salih Muslim, this radical change from dictatorship to this form of self-rule is not an easy process: “The people are learning how to govern themselves.” - Revolution Under Attack- The Alternative in the Midst of the War in Syria

Essentially, the masses in Rojava are carrying out a revolutionary democratic movement in their liberated base area under the leadership of the PYD, with the YPG's/YPJ's (People's Defense Units/Women's Defense Units) functioning as a people's army. This revolution is not exclusive to Kurds, but has aimed to win over and integrate other ethnic groups and nationalities, such as Arabs and Assyrians. Faced with

the question of how to relate to Arabs settled into Kurdish lands as part of the forced Arabization of the Kurds by the Baathists, the Kurds have chosen to take the route of revolutionary intercommunalism (in stark contrast with the Baathist practice of national oppression). While fighting Jihadists, the Kurds have allowed Arabs who wish to remain in Rojava to do so while assisting them in building their own democratic structures and self defense units. The YPG's are in fact a people's army, carrying out the political tasks of the revolutionary democratic struggle.

People's war, when fought as a protracted war requires the establishment of base areas to consolidate and further spread the revolutionary movement. The Kurds have done exactly this in Rojava, having created a base to fight for a new democratic Middle East free of imperialism and patriarchy. As in India, the Philippines, Peru, China, Vietnam, etc. the Kurdish struggle in Syria (as well as Turkey and Iran) demonstrates the universality of people's war.

For revolutionaries in the US, there is much to learn from the people's wars around the world. Socialism can only succeed here if the proletarian revolution is a struggle to break the empire and free the internally colonized nations held captive within the US. Any revolutionary tendency worth its weight must uphold the right to self determination of Chicanos, African Americans, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam, and First Nations; to oppose this democratic right of oppressed nations is to be stuck in the idealist fantasy that a system of production based on free association and free of class exploitation can be constructed without the liberation of those peoples subjugated and oppressed throughout the formation of the settler colonial empire that the US is. Liberation can only come about as a violent seizure of power and expropriation of the means of production from the imperialist bourgeoisie that engages in capitalist production and accumulation in this prison house of nations. Such an act of revolution will not come about through spontaneous rebellions nor a mere moment of insurrection, but rather through the active and organized resistance of the masses in the form of people's war, the subjective conditions for which must be created and not waited upon. This necessarily means the construction of a revolutionary party to agitate and organize among the masses to raise a people's army to defeat the bourgeoisie.

New Communist Party (Liaison Committee)

ncpliaison@gmail.com